FCC Chairman

F P of 11/15/69

Agnew Talk Endorsed

WASHINGTON (AP) — Dean Burch, new chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, endorsed Friday Vice President Spiro T. Agnew's charges of bias in network television newscasts, calling the criticisms thoughtful and provocative.

Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott not only agreed, he went Agnew one line better:

"I think the networks deserve a thorough goosing."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., said the Agnew speech was "an attack with the ultimate aim of dividing this country" on the issue of the Vietnam war. Agnew specifically assailed the way network analysts dealt with President Nixon's Nov. 3 address to the nation on Vietnam policy. Agnew said a majority of commentators "expressed in one way or another their hostility to what he had to say."

An FCC spokesman announced that Burch personally telephoned the chairmen of the three major television networks two days after the Nixon speech and asked for transcripts of the commentaries broadcast immediately afterward.

The spokesman said Burch had received "a number of complaints from congressional and other sources" about the commentaries.

"Vice President Agnew's comments last night on the television industry's news coverage were thoughtful, provocative and deserved careful consideration by the industry and the public," said Burch, a former Republican national chairman named by Nixon to head the agency which regulates broadcasting.

The White House said President Nixon watched on television Thursday night when Agnew discussed the networks and news at a regional Republican meeting in Des Moines, Iowa.

Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said Nixon rarely watches television but switched on a set for the Agnew speech, which was carried live by all three major networks.

"The President has great confidence in his vice president and he supports his vice president in the office," Ziegler said.

Ziegler, half jokingly, said Nixon himself has not discussed news coverage since 1962, when he bitterly denounced the reporting of his losing campaign for governor of California.

While the FCC does not directly supervise the networks, it does have regulatory power because of its control over license renewal of broadcast stations owned by the networks or affiliated with them.

Burch is to appear before the Senate communications subcommittee on Dec. 1 to testify on broadcast license renewal procedures; he may be questioned then about FCC network regulations.

One target of the Agnew attack was W. Averell Harriman, former U.S. negotiator at the Paris peace talks on Vietnam, and Democrats specifically protested that aspect of the speech.